

SUSQUEHANNA RIVER BASIN COMMISSION
1721 North Front Street • Harrisburg, PA 17102-2391 • www.srbc.net

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CONTACT: Susan Obleski
Director of Communications
Susquehanna River Basin Commission
Office: (717) 238-0423, x316
Cell: (717) 215-7278

**CONGRESSMAN PLATTS PRAISES RIVER ICE
OBSERVER PROGRAM AND ITS VOLUNTEERS**
Susquehanna River Flood Forecasting & Warning System Highlighted

WRIGHTSVILLE, Pa. – The Susquehanna River Basin Commission (SRBC) today joined Congressman Todd Platts (PA-19) as he praised the Susquehanna River Ice Observer Program and its 80 volunteer monitors, including a Wrightsville resident. The persistent ice on the Lower Susquehanna is a constant reminder of the importance of the Ice Observer Program, which is a winter-time component of the Susquehanna Flood Forecasting & Warning System.

Through the Ice Observer Program, local residents and emergency management officials throughout the Susquehanna River Basin are trained to look for specific river ice conditions that could contribute to ice jams, when the ice begins to break up. The volunteer monitors report their observations to the National Weather Service (NWS) once a week. This information helps NWS to forecast river heights and crest movements, and determine if local flood preparedness measures should be initiated in anticipation of potential flooding caused by ice jams.

“It’s not a matter of ‘if’ but ‘when’ the next flood will occur, in the Susquehanna River Basin,” said SRBC Executive Director Paul Swartz. “In 2003 alone, the basin received near-record precipitation and flooding caused the loss of six lives and millions of dollars of damages to homes, roads and bridges in the Susquehanna basin. For that reason, SRBC will do everything in its power to ensure that funding for the Susquehanna Flood Forecasting & Warning System is restored, starting in federal FY-05.”

The Susquehanna System was implemented in 1985 because the Susquehanna River Basin is one of the most flood-prone areas in the country. The Susquehanna System uses radar and a network of stream and rain gages to provide the data used to forecast river levels and issue accurate early flood warnings. For every federal dollar invested in the Susquehanna System, \$20 are saved in reduced damages and payouts from various federal flood recovery programs – thus boasting a 20-to-1 benefit-cost ratio.

“In a time of tight budgets, everyone understands and appreciates the need to curb spending,” said Paul Swartz, SRBC Executive Director. “However, the funding cut for

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the Susquehanna System doesn't make fiscal sense. The Susquehanna System is an extremely cost-effective flood protection measure, reducing the flood damages in the Susquehanna basin by an average of \$32 million each year."

The ice-jam flood in 1996 resulted in 14 lives lost and \$600 million in damages, becoming the third worst flood in the Susquehanna basin's history. The entire Commonwealth of Pennsylvania was declared a federal disaster area. Since that flood, the initiation of the volunteer ice observers and technological improvements to the Susquehanna System have better prepared forecasters to predict potential ice-induced flooding.

Thomas Graybill, a Wrightsville Ice Observer and resident, said, "During the winter months, most streams and rivers are prone to bank-to-bank icing, and keeping the NWS informed regularly about ice patterns and melting is a simple, easy thing to do to keep our communities safe."

"We can't control or prevent the times when Mother Nature wreaks havoc on us, but we can take preventive measures to ensure our safety," said Swartz. "It is vital that the federal government maintain funding for the critically important Susquehanna Flood Forecasting & Warning System."

SRBC is the governing agency established under a 100-year compact signed on December 24, 1970 by the federal government and the states of New York, Pennsylvania and Maryland to protect and wisely manage the water resources of the Susquehanna River Basin. The Susquehanna River starts in Cooperstown, N.Y., and flows 444 miles to Havre de Grace, Md., where the river meets the Chesapeake Bay.

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